

## **Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Cooperative Agreement for the Continued Operation of the Compliance Assistance Center Platform**

### **I. Summary**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has funded the development and operation of compliance assistance centers (centers) to help small and medium size businesses and local governments better understand and comply with environmental regulations. EPA seeks a partner for continued operation and maintenance of the Compliance Assistance Center Platform (Center Platform). Proposals meeting the criteria discussed below must be delivered to EPA by midnight, July 21, 2004.

The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance number and title for this project is # 66.305, Compliance Assistance Support for Services to the Regulated Community and other Assistance Providers. (See the web-site at [www.cfda.gov](http://www.cfda.gov)) This award may be funded up to \$1,330,000 over a 5-year period. EPA will initially fund on a one year basis and will consider funding the balance of the yearly budget requests contingent upon satisfactory progress as certified by the EPA Project Officer, the availability of funds, and EPA priorities.

### **II. Background**

Under the Grants Competition Policy that went into effect October 1, 2002, EPA now competes any assistance agreement or grant that will provide the recipient more than \$75,000 in a year.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has sponsored partnerships with industry, academic institutions, environmental groups and other federal and state agencies to establish thirteen Compliance Assistance Centers (Centers). The Centers provide comprehensive, easy to understand compliance information targeted specifically to industry sectors. In 1996, four Centers opened for business. The popularity of these Centers led to the opening of five more Centers in 1998, and one Center in 2000. Businesses, local governments, and assistance providers are using the centers. In FY 2003 the Centers were visited over 869,000 times by their target audiences and the public. These visits included over 3 million requests for web pages and targeted compliance documents.

In October 2001, EPA received a congressional earmark to "to facilitate industrial input into EPA's compliance assistance clearinghouse and to expand the scope of compliance assistance centers". In response to the congressional earmark, EPA partnered with the National Center for Manufacturing Sciences (NCMS) to develop the Center Platform from which new sector-specific or topical Centers can be "launched". The Center Platform includes a suite of comprehensive web-based tools necessary to create full-featured Centers. Funding a single

organization to efficiently create and manage the web-mechanics of a Center and to develop compliance assistance tools that all Centers can use has reduced the financial barrier to creating new Centers. EPA views the Center Platform as an opportunity to build upon the existing Centers programs to increase efficiencies and deliver assistance to more sectors.

In accordance with EPA policy encouraging competition for assistance agreements, the Agency now seeks proposals from qualified applicants who can partner with the EPA, various assistance provider and/or industry support organizations, and other interested parties and who have the capability both to support the continued development, operation and maintenance of the Center Platform, the current Center Platform based Centers, and to develop and maintain new Center Platform based Centers.

In general, the centers provide comprehensive, easy to understand sector-specific compliance information. The centers offer a variety of services, including web-sites, e-mail groups, on-line training, and telephone assistance, depending on the needs of the sector they are designed for. All the Centers help businesses, tribes, local governments, and federal agencies identify specific regulations that apply to their activities, improve compliance with environmental regulations, and learn about pollution prevention approaches that can save money and resources. All Centers can be accessed at [www.assistancecenters.net](http://www.assistancecenters.net).

EPA reviewed the responses to its Request for Initial Proposals, and determined that certain initial proposals met the eligibility criteria. EPA now seeks, by July 21, 2004, proposals from those eligible applicants for continued operation and maintenance of the Center Platform. This award may be funded up to \$1,330,000 over a 5-year period. EPA will partially fund each budget period and will consider funding the balance of budget requests contingent upon satisfactory progress as certified by the EPA Project Officer, the availability of funds, and EPA priorities.

### **III. Authority**

EPA will, as its annual appropriation allows, award financial assistance to the successful applicant in the form of a cooperative agreement. As authorized by 31 U.S.C. §6305, EPA will be substantially involved in carrying out this project. Anticipated substantial involvement will include collaboration in carrying out the scope of work, technical assistance, approval of the substantive terms of contracts and subawards made with EPA funds, change of key personnel, and approval of project phases prior to continuation of the project.

The Agreement will be funded on a “multimedia” basis under Section 103 of the Clean

Air Act, 42 U.S.C. §7403, Section 104 of the Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1254, and Section 8001 of the Solid Waste Disposal Act, 42 U.S.C. §6981. Applicants are encouraged to review these statutes and ensure that all of the activities contained in their proposals are consistent with the scope of EPA's authority.

Funding for Compliance Assistance Centers is awarded under Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 66.305, Compliance Assistance- Support for Services to the Regulated Community and Other Assistance Providers.

#### **IV. Applicant Eligibility**

Only those applicants that have been invited to participate following the Request for Initial Proposals are eligible.

#### **V. Overview of the Compliance Assistance Center Platform**

The ultimate goal of the Center Platform is to help industry comply with environmental regulations. The Center Platform is partnering with a broad range of trade and professional organizations and government agencies to create compliance assistance resources for a variety of sectors. To date, three Centers have been created and launched via Center Platform resources: Border Center ([www.bordercenter.org](http://www.bordercenter.org)); Environmental Compliance for Automotive Recyclers (ECAR) ([www.ecarcenter.org](http://www.ecarcenter.org)); and the Construction Industry Compliance Assistance Center (CICA Center) ([www.cicacenter.org](http://www.cicacenter.org)). Under this agreement, the Center Platform grantee must continue to support and maintain ECAR and CICA Center. In addition, the Center Platform grantee shall work with EPA and partnering organizations to maintain and expand the Border Center to address a broader range of topics and the US / Canada Border. At a minimum, the Border Center expansion will address TSCA, FIFRA, RCRA, CAA importer information needs. An importer is faced with several statutes (both EPA administered and other Federal agency requirements) to which they are subject. The Center Platform grantee should consider addressing not only all statutory requirements, but Harmonized Tariff System codes, links to the TSCA inventory of chemicals and FIFRA registered products, descriptions of on-going pilots and initiatives, and EPA self-auditing policies, etc..

EPA anticipates supporting the development of four to six new Centers over the next five years. EPA will enter into separate, competitively awarded cooperative agreements with "content experts" to provide expertise and content for the new Centers. The Center Platform grantee shall support the development of new Centers and will work intensively with its partners to identify specific customer needs, customize tools, and workout the distribution of

responsibilities. The Center Platform grantee will provide the server platform for new Centers. Additionally, the Center Platform grantee will build and maintain new Center Websites and work collaboratively with new Center partners to determine Website formatting and navigational aids. Furthermore, the Center Platform grantee will be responsible for:

- Applying for domain registration
- Designing attractive and user-friendly Website interfaces and graphics
- Writing HTML, Java and other script for Website pages
- Developing graphics, as needed, for virtual plant or facility tours
- Establishing a email group list or list serv, including the archiving of old messages
- Developing a receipt and tracking system to account for inquiry statistics

In FY 2005, EPA anticipates funding new Center development for the food processing and school/colleges/universities sectors.

In addition to specific Center development, the Center Platform has developed tools and resources that are available to other Centers and assistance providers. Most notably, the Center Platform has created and maintains a suite of state-specific resource locators (<http://www.envcap.org/statetools.htm>). The state resource locators are offered for a wide range of topics to help find important environmental compliance information specific to individual states. The continued operation of the Center Platform will include the maintenance of existing state resource locators and the development of new state resource locators and other tools to help the regulated community to better understand and comply with applicable state environmental regulations. The Center Platform grantee shall coordinate the development of new state regulatory compliance assistance tools with the current Center grantees (see Attachment A) to ensure that the final products will serve a broad audience.

Generally, the existing Centers use Cold Fusion and use a minimum amount of broad band demand to promote quick loading. The Centers have been tested for use on IE as well as Netscape. This information is provided for informational purposes only. Applicants can propose alternative approaches to carrying out the objectives of the Center Platform.

## **VI. Project Proposal**

All applicants must submit a proposal that identifies their ability to manage the Center Platform. Project proposals must, at a minimum, include the following items: Executive Summary, Project Activities, the Center Management Plan, Clients Needs, and Available Technologies as outlined below. EPA will negotiate a detailed scope of work with the successful applicant. The successful applicant will be asked to submit a Standard Form 424, Application for Federal Assistance following negotiation of the work plan (See [www.whitehouse.gov/OMB/grants/SF424.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/OMB/grants/SF424.pdf)) Please note that the final application will be subject to the Executive Order 12372 Intergovernmental Review Process. (See [www.cfda.gov/public/EO12372.htm](http://www.cfda.gov/public/EO12372.htm)) Applicants must clearly mark information they consider Confidential Business Information (CBI). EPA will make final confidentiality decisions in accordance with Agency regulations at 40 CFR Part 2, Subpart B. The applicant should consider the following project proposal format:

Executive Summary: A summary of the planned project.

Project Activities: The proposal should include a description of the following planned activities including milestones. Describe the approach(es) to:

- Maintain and supplement content currently available at the Center Platform
- Provide back-end Web support for the Border Center ([www.bordercenter.org](http://www.bordercenter.org)); Environmental Compliance for Automotive Recyclers ([www.ecarcenter.org](http://www.ecarcenter.org)); and the Construction Industry Compliance Assistance Center ([www.cicacenter.org](http://www.cicacenter.org)).
- Support the expansion of the Border Center to address environmental issues along the US/Canada border and to address additional environmental topics such as: TSCA, FIFRA, CAA importer requirements. (Currently, the Border Center supports those involved in the transportation of hazardous waste between the United States and Mexico).
- Maintain, develop, and enhance working relationship(s) with experts and national organizations devoted to compliance in the industry or government sectors addressed by the Center Platform.
- Identify compliance assistance needs regarding the access of state regulatory information and, in coordination with the current Center grantees, develop appropriate tools
- Conduct outreach to promote use of the Center Platform and its tools

- Explore and implement revenue generating activities to reduce the Center Platform center's reliance on federal funding;
- Correct, as necessary, content on the web-site that needs to be updated.
- Explore the development of compliance assistance tools that would be of value to the Compliance Assistance Centers, and as appropriate, develop such tools.
- Support the development and subsequent maintenance of an estimated four to six new Centers developed over the next five years.

Management Plan: A thorough discussion of how the grant will be managed, including:

- Internal Management Plan: Describe how the applicant will ensure the day to day success of the project. This description should include the proposed organizational structure, supervisory responsibilities, and a proposed staffing plan.
- External Management Plan: Project proposals must describe how the cooperative agreement recipient will solicit / maintain partners to support the Center Platform. Illustrate organizational structure between the primary project partners and supporting entities. Please note that all contracts for the purchase of goods and services must comply with the competitive procurement requirements of 40 CFR Part 30.
- Marketing and Outreach: A description of a marketing and outreach activity plan to promote the services provided by Center Platform.
- Financial Plan: A financial plan for the project that identifies all sources of funds. Although EPA does not require matching funds, the grant recipient is encouraged to provide information regarding resources (cash/in-kind services) that they would commit to manage center. The financial plan should break out planned expenditures by both activity (e.g., maintenance of the web site) and object class (e.g., personnel, travel).

Factors that EPA will evaluate in the financial plan include:

- ❖ Ability to partner with other organizations to secure funding or in-kind services to reduce reliance on Federal funding.
- ❖ Ability to maintain management control and track costs of the project and maintain required records on funding.

Past Experience and Qualifications of Key Personnel: Project proposals must:

- Describe the applicant's experience in developing and maintaining web based environmental compliance assistance services, or similar projects, and its experience in working with compliance issues related to the government or industry sectors .
- Provide information on its experience in managing Federal financial assistance, including the results of audits or monitoring by the awarding agency.
- Include a description of the qualifications and experience of key personnel and their responsibilities. A detailed description of how the qualification and/or experience of each key personnel match with his/her responsibilities is important.

Clients Needs: Understanding the environmental needs of the regulated community is critical to the continued success and sustainability of Center Platform center. Project proposals should address the following areas. How will:

- The applicant ensure the web site and individual Centers continues to be useful to the targeted user group(s)?
- The experiences of the key personnel enhance the Center Platform's operation?
- The applicant partner with key organizations to continue the support of the environmental compliance needs of targeted audiences?

Center Platform Technologies/Configuration: The ability to readily seamlessly adopt and maintain the existing Center Platform site and associated software is critical. Project proposals should address how:

- The recipient will ensure seamless operation of Center Platform capabilities.
- The recipient will assure that operation and technologies meet the needs of the users as identified by contact with representatives from the targeted audiences.

Collaboration with Other Compliance Assistance Providers: The proposal must explain how the Center Platform will interact and collaborate with other compliance assistance providers, government agencies, and organizations. Specifically, the proposal should address the following:

- How the applicant will collaborate with other compliance assistance providers to leverage limited resources.

- How the applicant will collaborate and partner with industry sector or other organization representatives to develop and maintain new Centers.
- Methods that the applicant will use to promote the use of the Center Platform center among other compliance assistance providers.
- How the applicant will evaluate and demonstrate the success of the Center Platform and Center Platform based Centers yearly, including output measurements and, if possible, measurements of risk reduction or compliance improvements for companies that use the Center Platform resources or Center Platform based Centers.

## **VII. Pre-application Assistance**

Eligible and interested applicants may contact Tracy Back (202/564-7076) with questions. EPA will post answers to significant or frequently asked questions on a web-site at <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/assistance/centers/index.html>. Applicants are encouraged to review these questions and answers prior to submitting final proposals. Please note, the Agency cannot provide guidance on proposal development or other advice that may provide a competitive advantage.

## **VIII. Proposal Evaluation Criteria**

EPA will use the following criteria to rank applications. Each proposal will be given a high, medium or low rating for each criterion. Each criterion will receive equal weight when EPA reviewers determine the overall merit of the proposal. Based on the ratings, EPA reviewers will select up to two proposals for consideration by the Agency selecting official.

1. Comprehensiveness of proposed approach to service delivery.
2. Innovations that may enhance compliance assistance services available to small businesses and the targeted audiences.
3. Demonstrated understanding of environmental compliance challenges faced by small businesses and the targeted audiences
4. Cost effectiveness and efficiency of proposed activities.
5. Qualifications and experience of key personnel in relation to their responsibilities.
6. Previous performance history on similar projects.



7. Soundness of approach to collaborating with other organizations.
8. Soundness of approach to outreach to all segments of the targeted audiences.
9. Soundness of proposed revenue generating activities that may reduce the Center Platform's reliance on Federal funding.

Any disputes that arise during the selection process will be resolved in accordance with 40 CFR 330.63 and Part 31, subpart F. (See web-site at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html>.) Please note that EPA reserves the right to reject all proposals or applications and make no awards.

## **IX. Proposal Submission**

Interested applicants should submit an electronic copy of the proposal at < [back.tracy@epa.gov](mailto:back.tracy@epa.gov) > and three copies hard-copies of the proposal to the following address by July 21, 2004.

Tracy Back (2224A)  
Office of Compliance, OECA  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Each proposal should not exceed 30 pages and it should include all of the information requested in this solicitation with a break down of budget for each category. A team of EPA personnel will evaluate the proposals based on the criteria set forth in Section VI and identify two applications for further consideration. An authorized Agency Approval Official in OECA will select the final applicant. An EPA award official will make the final award.

For questions, please contact Tracy Back by phone at (202) 564-7076, fax at (202) 564-0009 or e-mail at [back.tracy@epa.gov](mailto:back.tracy@epa.gov).